

THE BEGINNINGS OF UNIVERSITY LIFE. A FIELD OF STUDY UNDER CONSTRUCTION

LOS INICIOS A LA VIDA UNIVERSITARIA. UN CAMPO DE ESTUDIO EN CONSTRUCCIÓN

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ABSTRACT: This work falls within the field of the sociology of higher education and aims to identify the epistemological assumptions that shape and inform research on students' initial engagement with the university. Whether referred to as entry, access, or initiation. This issue began to be systematically studied during the 1990s, due to various waves of university expansion worldwide. Understanding the angles from which this topic is investigated allows us to reveal worldviews and, consequently, the educational conceptions that underpin higher education practices. To account for the proposed analysis, the main concepts developed around this issue were first listed, then put into dialogue with each other to identify their commonalities and differences. Finally, a semantic map was created to identify the proposed analytical path.

Keywords: *Higher Education, Transition to University Life, Educational sociology, Inequality, Field of study.*

RESUMEN: Este trabajo se inscribe en el campo de la sociología de la educación superior y tiene como objetivo identificar los supuestos epistemológicos que articulan y dan forma a las investigaciones sobre la primera vinculación del estudiante con la universidad. Ya sea bajo las denominaciones de ingreso, acceso o inicio. Esta problemática comenzó a estudiarse de manera sistemática durante la década de los 90, debido a las diversas olas expansivas de la universidad en el mundo. Conocer las aristas desde las cuales se indaga permite evidenciar las visiones del mundo y, con ello, las concepciones de educación que articulan las prácticas educativas del nivel superior. Para dar cuenta del análisis propuesto, en primer lugar se listaron los principales conceptos desarrollados en torno a esta problemática, luego se los puso en diálogo entre sí con el fin de identificar sus puntos en común y lo que los distancia. Finalmente, se busca dar cuenta de los principales conceptos que analizan la problemática del inicio a la vida universitaria en pos de determinar los alcances del campo de estudio.

Palabras clave: *Educación Superior, Inicios a la Vida Universitaria, Sociología educativa, Desigualdad, Campo de estudio.*

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INTRODUCTION

The link that is built between the student and the university is one of the objects of study that shapes the research agenda in Higher Education. Themed as admission, access, or start, these investigations seek to retrace the design of educational policies that universities define around their social functions and to know the challenges that students go through to account for their studies. These concepts, usually presented as synonyms, reflect different moments in the history of the modern university. In this sense, according to how they are approached, they can denote different dimensions of the agenda, such as the challenges of administrative and management policies regarding the various problems that students face in each of their stages of transit: admission, permanence, and graduation; teaching actions and thus, the pedagogical interventions required at this level; the promotion of research and extension.

Given the above, this paper seeks to retrace the meanings that articulate and shape these concepts. To this end, it is hypothesized that the question of “admission” asks who the university student is; and, with this, it is established that its analysis allows us to know the educational model that is used to account for their learning trajectory.

In order to account for this analysis, a review will be made of the main research undertaken in the United States, Europe and Latin America on the problem of admission in order to identify the points they have in common, those that are in disagreement and those that present continuity. The aim is to investigate the possibility of a field of knowledge related to studies on the first link between the student and the university, establishing its limits and objects of study.

PRESENTATION OF THE PROBLEM

The question of “entry” to higher education is not new and is linked to the expansive waves of the university system in the world (Clark, 2015; Dubet, 2017, 2023; Chiroleu, 1999; Pogré, 2014). That is to say, since the 1970s as a corollary of the inclusive policies for education of developmental governments, students who were not previously part of the university have

begun to arrive at the university. This situation brings new questions and, as Clark (2015) points out, redefines admission in terms of “access” making it a moment in which inequalities in education become evident.

Higher learning becomes problematic for social analysts as it grows in importance to the general population, to economic and government elites (...) The new demands have caused major problems in external adaptation to rapidly changing sectors of society (Clark, 2015, p. 20).

Thus, “expansion” is assumed to be a turning point leading the sociology of higher education to address it in two dimensions. On the one hand, the effect that colleges exert on the character, beliefs, and thinking of the student body. And, on the other, the “inequality” in education beyond high school; that is, inequality in terms of class, race, ethnicity, and gender.

This proposal by Clark (2015) is read in different ways in Europe and Latin America. Whether placing the gaze on the educational transition in the first years (Tinto, 2017), considering the processes of affiliation (Coulon, 2017), or in the institutional actions that universities carry out in the format of scholarships or educational inclusion programs. The question of entry and with it, the “first linkage” is present in the educational field driving multiple and varied questions.

This development in research occurs in dialogue with the management programs undertaken by the universities; that is to say, the studies on admission are studies given around educational policy and, with it, the State. Thus, the objects it defines and the questions it raises must be read from this point of view. In this sense, the word “admission” is a concept and leads to the question of whether it can be assumed as a synonym of “access” and “beginning”. Therefore, do the three denominations refer to the same reality? And if not, what reality do they define?

To retrace these meanings and to be able to know the subjects and practices that indicate these concepts, this paper wonders about the objects defined by these investigations, what nuances distinguish them, and what epistemological assumptions sustain them. These questions are based on the recognition that the researchers who ask themselves about

admission are questioning the university in transformation and with it, higher education as an educational model.

METHODOLOGY

This article is based on the study of a corpus of research, journal articles, books, and conferences of researchers working in the field of higher education. Thus, the methodological positioning is of bibliographic documentary analysis (Cohen et al., 2017), of a canon produced between the 1970s and 2024. The choice of this temporality responds to the recognition of the first expansive wave of creation of universities in the world and its consequent increase in student enrollment extending to the present.

This canon was elaborated in a regressive manner, that is, from the present to the past and from the local to the international. The local is understood as the productions and/or research undertaken in Argentina. In order to build it, the main works of researchers who take income as an object of study were selected and their bibliography was reviewed. From this, the recurrent authors and their main works were identified and then categorized. This work led to the construction of a data matrix that made it possible to identify the main authors - in this case the most cited ones - and to relate them to the topics/objects they study, as shown in the following figure:

Figure 1

Data matrix on the first link

MATRIZ DE DATOS			
Sobre la primera vinculación			
Conceptos	Derivaciones	Autores	País
El ingreso como acceso	Gramáticas de admisión selección Limitación	Clark (2015) Gumport (2015) Chiroleu (1999)	Argentina Estados Unidos
El ingreso desde la persistencia y el abandono	Transición/ afiliación/oficio universitario/ Experiencia	Dubet (2005) Tinto (1993) Coulon (2017) Carli (2007) Pierella (2014) Fuentes (2022)	Francia, Estados Unidos, Argentina
Ingreso y aprendizaje del código académico	Escribir a través del curriculum; Alfabetización Académica; literacidad; Didáctica de la lengua	Cassany y Morales (2009) Alvarado (2013) Urus (2023) Bombini (2023) Carlino (2002)	España Argentina
Ingreso desde la pedagogía	Acompañamiento Articulación entre niveles	Vercellino y Logré (2023) Mancovsky (2019) Pierella (2019)	Argentina
Ingreso desde la política educativa	Democratización de la educación superior/ Educación con enfoque de derecho/ desigualdades	Ezcurra (2017) Gvirtz y Camou (2019) Gorostiaga Cambours Ocampo (2019)	Argentina

Elaboración con fuentes propias

Source: own elaboration.

This matrix was completed by conducting five in-depth interviews with researchers from Argentina and the analysis of 92 scientific articles published between the 1970s and 1980s, from 1990 to 2006, and from 2010 to 2024. This periodicity corresponds to the years in which they were published in the journals of origin.

Once the matrix was constructed, the analysis was carried out from the perspective of bibliographic problematization (Williams, 2009). With this, we sought to show that the meanings addressed are not rigid, given that they are constituted following a hegemonic logic that can make them endure over time as residual, archaic and even constitute structures of feeling (Williams, 2009). This positioning makes it possible to establish a semantic field of the conceptual derivations that surround university entrance and to note what is being talked about at each moment in history when it is asked about who the student is.

ANALYSIS OF THE CONCEPTUALIZATION OF UNIVERSITY ADMISSION

Entrance from an International Perspective

Within these perspectives, the contributions made by Clark, Tinto, Dubet, Coulon, Cassany and Morales are addressed. These authors focus the analytical look firstly around access to education in terms of accessibility conditions (Clark 2015). Tinto (2017) does so in terms of what the student does to persist. Dubet (2005) analyzes how today's young people become students and in the face of this analyzes their experience at university. Coulon (2017) questions the processes leading to the formation of the university profession. Finally, Cassany and Morales (2009) question entrants in the processes of construction of their literate practices. These contributions are developed below.

Admission as access and admission grammar

Clark, in the search to define the field of study of the Sociology of Higher Education, defines it as one of its topic's university accesses and from there investigates admissibility, that is, "the impact of social class mobility on the mobility of young people in primary and secondary school, including those who finished high school and could access college" (Clark, 2015, p. 24).

McDonough and Fan (2007) point out that Clark, in asking how organizations shape or limit educational opportunities, establishes the relationship between individual agency and organizational structure, a relationship that accounts for inequalities in access to education. Thus, the authors call for an analysis of the field of university access and describe it "as a network of opportunities and structural arrangements" (McDonough and Fan, 2007, p. 85). In this framework, they indicate that research on access to education from the perspective of inequality can be organized into three dimensions:

- Individual: here we analyze the process of formation of students in their preparation for college and the actions related to their possibility of access. The theoretical framework for this work is Pierre Bourdieu, and Max Weber and approaches with cultural perspectives that allow us to understand how diverse groups of individuals,

families, and communities move through college access (McDonough and Fan, 2007, p. 85).

- Organizational: this dimension takes into account organizational contexts as critical to understanding empirical models of individual outcomes. In this sense, they “observe organizational plans and processes within institutions and the connections between organizations that act as mediators” (p. 86).
- Field: here are grouped the investigations that direct their integral attention to individual, organizational, and inter-organizational interests and actions. These works make evident the constellation of factors that affect the cumulative and complex process of joining an institution” (p. 89).

From this work, the authors following Clark (2015) construct a definition on “access” to college which they call:

The pursuit of post-secondary education is a long-term systemic event in which individual opportunity is constrained or enabled by educational structures, free choices of rational, goal-oriented individuals, and the complex interplay of individuals and structures over the course of educational careers. (McDonough and Fan, 2007, p. 89).

Clark's research, as well as that of McDonough and Fan, situates inequality in access based on the recognition that students do not have equal access to university. This may be due to race, gender, social and cultural status. In this sense, how higher education institutions account for this is one of the objects of study of educational sociology.

Entrance in terms of experience, persistence, and affiliation

Another dimension that is asked about entry refers to the experience that this student goes through when moving from high school to university and how he or she manages to persist. In this sense, authors Tinto (2017, 2023), Dubet (2023), and Coulon (2017) offer some clues for analysis.

The first, Vincent Tinto, develops a line of research that looks not only at dropout but also at how an entrant becomes a student at the university. This position leads him to investigate

what they do to persist and what the university does to make this happen. In this regard, he proposes to investigate from the students' experience, focusing on motivation:

So, what do we learn about the roots of motivation when we adopt their perspective? we learn that students' experiences in the first year influence their motivation to persist because they shape both their perception of their ability to succeed, also known as self-reliance, and their sense of belonging and their perception of the relevance of their studies. (Vercellino, 2021, p. 19)

The author argues that “self-efficacy” is not inherited, but is learned from past and current experiences. Thus, students who doubt or question their ability to perform in the university question and doubt their sense of belonging. Although “self-efficacy” is built individually, it is influenced by the institutional actions that universities design for the development of their professional training trajectory. One of these refers to the curricular design and its relationship with the professional profiles that students seek for themselves. This relationship contributes to motivation and thus to persistence.

From another angle, Coulon (2017) argues like Tinto that the problem is not to enter the university, but to stay. Faced with this situation, he argues that the student must learn the student's trade, which implies learning to become, otherwise he is eliminated or self-eliminated because he remains a foreigner to that new world. Thus, university life is like a passage: it is necessary to pass from the status of “pupil” to that of “student”. And like any passage, it requires an initiation. Here Coulon dialogues with Vincent Tinto (2017) in recognizing that the transition between high school and university entails the passage of various steps involving a ritual. But he differs from him, given that, he constructs the concept of “affiliation” as that process by which someone acquires a new social status. “The student must show his know-how since it is a condition for achieving good results” (Coulon, 2017, p. 1240).

The entrance to the university can be analyzed as a passage, and the author proposes that this can occur in three stages: that of “foreignness”, that of learning, and that of affiliation. This process takes place within the framework of a set of changes that occur in the emotional and affective order.

Sharing the concern for the challenges involved in staying in university and recognizing the new students who enter higher education as a result of the massification of universities since 1960, Dubet (2005) indicates that “in the mass university, students enter with less defined social roles and are ‘forced’ to construct their own experiences, their way of being a student” (para. 3).

With this statement, the author argues that the massification of higher education favored the emergence of a new subject that is neither heir nor academic. At the same time, he emphasizes that the expansion diversifies and hierarchizes the system. However, “we must be aware that (...) the diversity of origins, careers, academic levels, life circumstances, costs, and expected benefits is undoubtedly the rule” (Dubet, 2023, para. 14).

In this regard, Dubet invites us to ask ourselves why students study, and thus focus on the experience they build in their relationship with the university. This will make it possible to recognize the new diversified student and identify the motives that lead them to undertake their studies. At this point it is possible to find a relationship with the aspects pointed out by Vincent Tinto when he addresses persistence, given that Dubet argues that institutional integration such as vocation and with it the desire, make the student study. However, unlike him, he states that this also crystallizes inequality, since he recognizes that new students are far from having the new dispositions to sustain themselves in this world, which is often presented to them as strange. Thus, he argues that “the acquisition of codes, values, and ways of working requires a long and difficult task of acculturation” (para. 18).

Admission and the construction of literate practices

Another dimension that addresses the problem of the student's first link with the university refers to research from the field of language teaching at the higher education level. Here we can distinguish the work of Cassany and Morales (2009). The authors argue that reading and writing are two unavoidable instances at the higher level and add: “with texts we manage our incorporation and permanence in literate communities” (Cassany and Morales, 2009, p. 109). Although these two authors do not have university entrance, access or the beginning of university as the object of their research, they do not neglect these aspects.

Starting from the consideration of “literate practices” from a communicational and thus sociocultural perspective, they address the challenges involved in the learning of “new entrants”. This is problematized from a specific point of view: the didactics of language. Thus, they take the contributions of the teaching positioning through the *curriculum*² but they put tension on their position centered on the “deficits” by indicating that:

The view that many university teachers have today about reading and writing derives from dominant linguistic and psychological conceptions in education. In our opinion, these ideas offer a schematic and reductionist vision of literacy, which does not contribute to identifying the difficulties encountered by our students or proposing effective solutions (Cassany and Morales, 2009, p. 110). (Cassany and Morales, 2009, p. 110).

In relation to the above, the authors consider that the starting points or visions that teachers and institutional managers have about the literate practices of incoming students are grouped into the following categories:

- University students already know how to read and write. This situation leads us to recognize the unequal access to culture and thus to education.
- Reading and writing are practices independent of each other and of the domain of the specific discipline. This does not allow us to see that literate practices are embedded in broader social practices.
- Reading and writing are not reduced to the communicability of data but refer to a form of knowledge construction.

In this sense, the authors position themselves from the sociocultural perspective, arguing that this “significantly broadens the relevant functions played by discursive genres within each discipline” (p. 113). This is because they involve knowledge construction processes that are specific to each field of knowledge. In this sense, they promote the construction of the identity of the authors-readers. Therefore, this has a significant impact on the construction of

² As Mariana Urus (2023) indicates, this movement was disseminated through Bazerman C., Little, J., Bethel, L. Chavkin, T., Fouquette, D. and Garufis, J. In Argentina, Mexico and Spain, in addition to these authors, it was disseminated through the research of Paula Carlino.

the professional role. Thus, to become a student, literate practices play a fundamental role and universities must generate actions that make it possible. Cassany and Morales (2009) consider that the path to follow should be one that does not focus on the lack but recognizes the inequality of access to education. From there, meaningful professional training is possible.

Entrance from an Argentinean point of view

Based on the articulation coming from the data matrix, the research developed from Argentina in pursuit of university admissions defines the following dimensions:

- The design of educational policies for admission
- Admission as a transition, a passage zone, affiliation, experience, etc.
- Admission from the pedagogical point of view
- Admission from the point of view of specific didactics

These works are developed within a specific temporality: in the decade of 1995 and 2015. Two years in which two laws on higher education were sanctioned, first 24.521/95 and 27.204/15. Both regulate the university entrance system; the first one regulates admission levels, and the second one, eliminates the restriction. In this sense, the particularity of the Argentine case makes it possible to highlight other issues related to admission and analyze them in light of the historical development of the university. By this work, the theoretical contributions related to the indicated dimensions will be developed.

The design of educational policies for admission

This dimension includes research on the conditions for access and the relationship between the university and the secondary level. About the former, the work of Chiroleu (1999), who seeks to answer the question of how Higher Education Systems are transformed, stands out. To this end, he develops a comparative study in which he analyzes the dimensions of admission in terms of admission and the political implications this has in terms of considering higher education from a perspective of rights. In this sense, he defines *admission* as:

The power to allow entry. This would imply the recognition of two parties to the problem: the one that demands access, and the one that imposes a determined policy in this regard (...) The university admission policy, as a set of guidelines and procedures aimed at regulating access to this level, thus constitutes an essential component of the higher education policy whose establishment arises from the relationship between applicants - public power in a given temporal and spatial context, and includes technical aspects within a general political and social matrix, previously established. (Chiroleu, 1999, p. 29).

From this point of view, the author questions the restrictions that account for the logic of “admission”, tensing the relationship between selecting or not selecting. This research is significant and foundational for studies on the *student's “first link” with the university* because it analyzes and contextualizes the institutional actions that both universities and the Argentine and Brazilian states carried out during the 1980s and 1990s; in doing so, it contextualizes by giving it a significant historical value.

Chiroleu starts from the comparative perspective and dialogues with authors such as Burton Clark, José Joaquín Brunner, Pierre Rosanvallon, and Pierre Bourdieu, among others. He makes his concern for the scope of the expansion of the higher education system, and the challenges it poses to politics and from there raises a concern: “At present, its survival seems to be subject once again to the influence of extra-university factors, in this case, the correspondence with the directions indicated by the most influential international organizations” (Chiroleu, 1999, p. 128).

The author wrote her thesis in the heat of the higher education law sanctioned in 1995 and in the midst of the neoliberalism of the nineties; from there, her analysis is an invitation to deepen the policies in virtue of higher education as a right.

Another view on this dimension is provided by the work of the coordinators Gvirtz and Camou, mainly for their book “La universidad Argentina en Discusión...” (2009); Cambours de Donini and Gorostiaga for the coordination of the book “Hacia una universidad inclusiva: nuevos escenarios y miradas” (2016), and Ezcurra for “Igualdad en la Educación Superior. Desafío global y respuesta nacional” (2011). These works dialogue with their time and echo

the concerns that the 27204/15 Law crowns: higher education with a focus on rights. In this sense, one of the dimensions contributed by these works refers to the restrictive or unrestricted nature of admission. The discussion focused between progressivism or conservatism, say the authors, would not allow us to see the root of the problem:

The need to move towards a systemic approach, covering at least the vocational orientation of applicants, the leveling of their knowledge and skills, the planning of enrollment, and the selection/channeling of students either to the chosen university career, as well as to other instances and opportunities for education and training. (Cambours de Donni and Gorostiaga, 2016, p. 12).

This starting point for the analysis would make it possible to go beyond the supposed democratic virtues that the student dropout rate would hide. Duarte (2009) assumes to the discussion of admission systems (restricted and unrestricted) the distinction made by Tedesco between formal and informal access to certain knowledge to guarantee certain minimum levels of knowledge. Duarte classifies “admission systems” into three groups: free, by qualification, and by competence. This categorization recognizes that institutional actions make evident the visions that universities have through the processes of knowledge construction and the conditions required to be part of it.

Another author who addresses democratization in terms of *equality and inclusion* is Ana María Ezcurra (2011, 2019), who, like Vincent Tinto (1997, 2017), starts from the recognition of massification as the process that leads to the arrival at the university of *new students* and with it, dropout. “Global massification (...) has opened the entrance to social fringes previously excluded. Also, in central capitalism. A process of social inclusion” (Ezcurra, 2011, p. 16). This situation indicates the construction of a growing social gap. On this point, Ezcurra relies on Tinto and indicates that, even though many of these students are the first generation of university students in their families, “*this achievement is only apparent since the dropout rate in these groups is much higher*”.

The “first generation status” is conceptualized as

an adverse, structural and critical conditioning factor (...) low-income and first-generation students are more likely to suffer from other conditioning *factors for dropping out, such as being full-time workers, having a partial dedication to study, delaying entry to the post-secondary cycle after middle school and belonging to ethnic sectors*. (Ezcurra, 2011, p. 23).

After an exhaustive analysis, the author argues that the institutional actions defined by universities and educational environments in Argentina take place within a dynamic of exclusionary inclusion. With this assertion, she advances on Tinto's model by stressing the educational policies defined at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

Admission in terms of transition, passage zone, affiliation, experience, etc.

Dialoguing with the concern about the conditions of access to higher education, the research articulated in this dimension questions the student and teacher experience in the transition to the first year, the inter-institutional articulation, and the development of educational materials for the passage zone.

This section is included in the recognition of higher education as a public good and, therefore, as a right of citizenship. In this regard, Pogr   et al. indicate:

We consider the entry stage to be the stage between the end of secondary school and the first years of university (...) this definition of “entry” implies challenges for student learning but fundamentally for university education that merits a multidimensional reflection and analysis (...).) Another definition that is challenged by the redefinition of “admission” is “articulation”, about the link between the university and the secondary school, since this is no longer seen as a hierarchical relationship between the institutions to be conceived as part of an integral process in which the practices of both levels must be reviewed and put in dialogue. (Pogr   et al., 2018, para. 8)

These considerations contribute significant elements to the analysis since they consider the new students and from there, they challenge the development of institutional actions for the articulation between levels.

Within this perspective, Bombini and Labeur (2017) propose that a new temporality emerges: that of the passage zone, which is defined as “the space that comprises the student body from the moment they begin to wonder about what they will do after high school and that extends until they begin to take their first subjects at university” (Unidad Académica Caleta Olivia - UNPA, 2023).

A concept that expresses an institutional, personal and political temporality; a place that is inhabited and in which one is transformed. From this perspective, Bombini argues that teaching actions that account for inter-institutional articulation should be developed. However, unlike Pogr  et al., the author proposes the development of specific materials that intervene in the students' learning processes: *materials for the passage zone* (Sotelo, 2024a-b). Thus, he considers that in this *temporality* a learning subject is constructed, which requires the development of specific writing strategies that *neither the school nor the university teaches today*. In this sense, Bombini links with the theoretical proposal of Coulon (2017) and Charlot (2008), regarding the challenges that learning at the university implies for the student, both procedurally and about knowledge. Thus, it postulates that, if what is intended is that higher education has a right-based approach, learning must be accompanied in the student body from the moment they decide that this will be their place (Unidad Acad mica Caleta Olivia - UNPA, 2023).

Another aspect that configures the problematic of the “passage zone” refers to the concept of “transition”. In this sense Pierella (2019) argues that the diversity of student experiences configures a heterogeneous space that surpasses institutions; he calls this space a “transition zone”.

In line with this approach, Vecellino and Pogr  (2023) approach the meeting zone between levels as a transition space, understood as synonymous with the transformation of the subject at the beginning of university life.

Finally, another concept that emerges in this analysis refers to “affiliation”. Deeply related to the above, this aspect allows us to analyze how someone becomes a university student. To address this issue, the main studies (Carli, 2012, 2014, 2019; Pierrella, 2019; Brachi, 2016)

are articulated around “experience”. From this perspective, they ask about the choices - academic or not - that significantly gravitate toward the construction of learning trajectories:

The study of the university experience suggests reconstructing the practices of students in everyday life through the narratives of their itineraries but paying particular attention to the analysis of historical contexts, institutional settings, and epochal discourses. (Carli, 2012, p. 31)

In this sense, a gaze is constructed that is positioned from cultural studies to address the processes of signification of the practices of the subjects (Sotelo, 2024c-d). From there, studying the process by which someone becomes a student implies grasping the complex relationships given in society and culture, which become evident in everyday life.

In the course of this analysis, Coulon's (2017) perspective, which refers to the construction of the *university profession* in terms of the path that students follow and that leads them to become part of higher education, runs as a backdrop. Here, Carli, Santos Sharpe and Pierrella, from the analysis of the experience and from the problematization of the significance of the practices constructed by the student in his daily life in dialogue with his becoming in the institution, contribute the concept of *affiliation*.

Admission from a pedagogical perspective

Another dimension that thematizes the first link between the student and the university refers to the pedagogical positioning assumed by first-year teaching. A dimension that is not new in the field of the sociology of Higher Education (Clark, 2015; Gumport, 2015), it emerges with force when the twenty-first century begins to average.

Within this axis, the research carried out by Más Rocha and Mancovsky (2019) stands out, who, from the enunciation of a necessary “pedagogy of accompaniment”, argues:

That universities expect “students”: subjects who know that way of being a student, who can decode and incorporate certain rules to quickly deploy the practices they refer to: from taking notes to organizing times for study, from adjusting to a new type of calendar (different from that of secondary education) to changing classmates in each subject, from learning to study to projecting themselves as professionals, all this

while sustaining their doubts and uncertainties about whether what they are doing has to do with what they came for or whether they have the conditions to do it (...) from the perspectives of students at the beginning, these questions appear as those difficult to fulfill. ...) From the perspectives of students at the beginning, these questions appear as those conditions that are difficult to fulfill. (Más Rocha and Mancovsky, 2019, p. 21).

The authors argue that public higher education with a rights-based approach is not possible if it is not accompanied by an accompaniment of the unequal learning processes of students. For this reason, one of the entry points to the following problem is “the logic of the subjects, students and professors and their subjective experiences within the framework of a university institution” (p. 12).

In this sense, Más Rocha and Mancovsky state that in the face of this “new student, a pedagogy is required that accounts for it, that focuses on teacher reflection, on the doing, thinking and feeling of the teacher who receives the new students” (p. 205). This requires teachers to reflect on their practices and the challenges involved in the relationship with the knowledge they promote. In other words, he distances himself from a pedagogy that knows in advance what is going to happen as if the learning process were centrally rational and teleological.

This theoretical and methodological point of view connects with the work undertaken by Vercellino and Pogr  (2023), since both authors reflect on the teaching practices of both experience and curricular organization and how these foster a certain relationship with knowledge, in this case, in first-year university teaching.

Entry and specific didactics

Faced with the question of the processes of knowledge construction, it is essential to focus on the development of strategies for literate practice. In this regard, Urus (2023) indicates that for twenty years this concern has been a problem of teaching in higher education and that it occurs “as a consequence of expansion and massiveness: attrition, chronicity and the low number of graduates” (p. 12).

Thus, this problem is part of the studies of the first link between students and the university and, as such, it is approached from the design of institutional actions -creation of support plans such as tutoring, and curricular modifications with the incorporation of subjects that account for the learning of the academic code, among others- to the design of didactic strategies aimed at the construction of the academic code.

Urus argues that, although several of these strategies have been linked to the university since its origins -as previously observed in the writing programs of American universities- in Argentina they were reinforced with the creation of the evaluation agency CONEAU and the career accreditation instances (Urus, 2023, p. 13). This implied “reaching minimum quality standards”, a situation that referred not only to the equipment of the careers and their curricula but also to the academic performance of the student body. Although this is the point at which institutional actions related to language learning at the university are systematized, this issue has occupied a central place in the university agenda since the 1990s.

This author indicates that the approach to these literate practices responds to two approaches: the first refers to teaching based on discursive genres (Alvarado, 2013) and the second to writing through the curriculum (Carlino, 2010, 2024). This “aims at forming competent students” since they are based on the recognition of deficits (Urus, 2023, p. 38). Within this line, the manuals and/or guides for academic/scientific writing elaborated for the student to learn to read and write in the university can be inscribed (Marín, 2019).

From another point of view, which is based on the consideration of sociocultural inequality, the proposal of literacy or the communicational approach to language teaching arises. From there, they propose the recognition of inequality and with it, the approach to inclusion:

The will to include a growing number of students in universities requires the implementation of efforts that go beyond the provision of strictly material resources (...) quality inclusion, which seeks continuity and good performance of students throughout their academic career and in their subsequent professional life, imposes the strengthening of their symbolic resources. For this, the contributions coming from the field of academic literacy will undoubtedly be of great help. (Natale and Stagnaro, 2017, p. 40).

Thus, these proposals are distanced from the former, since they are not positioned from a position that seeks to account for a “deficit” but rather recognizes inequality as the starting point for access to education. From there, writing and reading are not presented as an external action to fill a void; on the contrary: it is realized that unequal trajectories refer to unequal forms of access to culture and that teaching must start from there to accompany learning. Therefore, “inclusion” is given by recognizing the other, recognizing their ways of naming the world and narrating it.

The analysis developed allowed us to establish that the study of the first link between the student body and the university is manifested in the growing expansion of the higher education system since it expresses the growing inequality regime in which the subject (whether teacher or student) is enrolled. The “expansion of the system” and “inequality” are two concepts approached from different perspectives, which in some cases converge, but which, even in their difference, thematize and dimension this subject. By favoring the synthesis of the mentioned aspects, some conclusions are presented below.

First, the expansion of the higher education system at the international level challenges the traditional university in its *ethos*, since it favors the entry of new students (Clark, 1960; Chiroleu, 1999; Duarte, 2009; Dubet, 2005; Ezcurra, 2011).

Secondly, in Argentina, this “expansion” will assume two approaches: those that address entry in terms of access and those that focus on the “beginning” and/or transition. This is due to a substantial temporal dimension: the sanctioning of the Higher Education Law 24.521 of 1995 and Law 27.204 of 2015. In the first law, it is stated that “entry” can be given freely or restrictively (through exams, courses, etc.). In the second one, it is established that admission is free, free of charge, and with a “right” approach. The works of Chiroleu (1999, 2024), Carlino (2024), Duarte (2009), Ezcurra (2011), Pierella (2014), and Pogr  (2014), analyze the first linkage in terms of conditions of accessibility to higher education. That is, they focus the gaze on how the entry is presented both in terms of inclusion/exclusion, whether in the design of educational policies or didactic strategies. The question here is how this entry favors the democratization of higher education.

It can be affirmed that these two groups of works make an analytical movement that goes from considering the “first link” in terms of admission access and selection to considering the “first link” in terms of “beginnings to university life”. This movement starts from the consideration of admission from the prescription of requirements that indicate the properties that those who intend to study at the university must have. This prescription assumed different nuances throughout the history of Argentina and was studied -as was observed in this work- in a significant way in the 1990s. This movement goes, then, from the consideration of “entrance” as that which marks a class position and thus a starting point to address the tracing of educational trajectories in terms of admission and selection; and extends to the elimination of the prescriptions; a moment of closure of meaning and opening of a new analytical stage. The above can be represented graphically as follows:

Figure 2*From entry to beginnings*

Source: own elaboration.

CONCLUSIONS

From the work developed and following the cadence of this analysis, a set of concepts begin to emerge that thematize and dimension the studies on the “beginnings in university life”, and as the main contribution to the analysis, these concepts are grouped into six dimensions related to the “first link with the university”. In this sense, it can be concluded that:

- Institutional actions. Here are grouped the papers that, on the one hand, address the formal and informal mechanisms surrounding admission. On the other hand, those that refer to the construction of the higher education system. One of the central themes of these works refers to inequality, the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion, and how this conditions access to education. The contributions of Chiroleu (1999), Didou Aupetit and Chiroleu (2022), Cambours de Donni and Gorostiaga (2016), Ezcurra, (2011, 2019) and Duarte (2009) stand out.
- Construction of the academic code. The works that address the learning processes of reading and writing are grouped. It starts from the recognition that higher education is a

specific communicative situation that presents specific logic in the production of knowledge and that this must be learned. Some authors, such as Carlino, argue that this should be done from the position that writing practices are made from the curriculum, assuming a remedial stance. Others, such as Urus and Bombini, emphasize the recognition of the inequality of access to culture and education and how this inequality affects the learning process. This positioning leads them to argue that the academic code should account for this position in culture. This axis crystallizes the contributions of authors such as Cassany and Morales, exponents of academic literacy.

- Pedagogical Approach. The work of Mancovsky, Vercellino, and Pierella stands out here, which develops a profound contribution to the question of how to approach the learning challenges of new students. Within this framework, they propose a pedagogy for beginners based on a specific epistemological positioning: accompaniment. It engages in a theoretical dialogue with the author, Charlot and Beillerot.
- Articulation/passage zone. Within this axis, the works of Pogr  and Bombini are centrally identified. The former, by indicating that admission is reduced to an administrative procedure and that, therefore, the first linkage of the student occurs in terms of beginnings, it is necessary for the institutions that make up the higher education system to articulate with the secondary level to favor this beginning. In this sense, Bombini considers that the “first link” implies a beginning that takes place in a passage zone. Therefore, instances of didactic intervention should be implemented that have a significant impact on learning at the university level. Thus, unlike Pogr , Bombini proposes the design of educational materials for the passage zone. This is taken into consideration since it is a zone in which students begin to form themselves for a new life. They dialogue theoretically with the authors Alvarado, Tinto, and Coulon.
- Transition. This is a common concept in research that investigates the relationship between secondary school and higher education. However, it takes on two dimensions whether it is approached in Spain or Argentina. In the first, it is considered as the movement made by the student during the university course. In this sense, they take Tinto, since they read admission in terms of permanence and therefore, they seek to know how

dropout occurs. To this end, they explore aspects such as self-efficiency and motivation. In Argentina, this concept takes on another meaning when it is considered as a movement and change that occurs when moving from one level to another. Transition as change, as transformation: one stops being a student to be another. A dimension that qualifies this approach is the consideration of time as a new variable that thematizes the new life.

- Experience/affiliation. Seeking to understand how someone becomes a student in higher education, Carli's working groups, together with Santos Sharpe and Pierella, investigate the experience and, in turn, affiliation. They take the contributions of Coulon, Dubet, and researchers from English cultural studies. From here, the view of the “heir” and with it, reproduction, is strained to consider how the sociocultural dimensions shape the “new student”.

It is hoped that this construction of dimensions for the classification of studies on the beginnings of university life not only constitutes a contribution to continue incorporating works on the subject but also contributes to a better understanding of the ideas, design, and implementation of actions aimed at improving the link between students and the university, from a national, regional and global perspective.

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